30 July 2007

Original: English

Second regular session 2007
10-14 September 2007, New York
Item 14 of the provisional agenda
Field visits

Report of the field visit of the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA to Mexico (29 April to 5 May 2007)

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I. Introduction

1. In keeping with its mandate to organize periodic visits to programme countries in order to better appreciate the work of the UNDP and UNFPA, the Executive Board arranged a field visit to Mexico for Board members, from 29 April to 5 May 2007. The mission was undertaken by a 10-member team, accompanied by the Senior Editor of the UNDP Executive Board secretariat and the Chief, Executive Board and External Relations Branch of UNFPA.[1] Mr. Nor-Eddine Benfreha of Algeria was elected Team Leader, while Ms. Milica Nauman of Canada and Mr. Troy Torrington of Guyana were nominated rapporteurs for the mission.

2. The objectives of the mission were premised on Executive Board decision 94/4 and subsequent guidelines, which require the provision of observations to stimulate the discussions of the Executive Board with a view to enhancing its contributions for increased effectiveness and efficiency on the part of UNDP and UNFPA.

3. In pursuit of these goals, the team met with the staff of the UNDP, UNFPA; officials of the Government of Mexico; and representatives of civil society. The team travelled to a variety of projects in different states of Mexico to get first-hand insights into the operation of UNDP and UNFPA and the impact of their work. The mission was divided into two groups to focus on the work of the UNDP and UNFPA respectively.

4. Officials and project participants expressed interest in meeting with the mission and in sharing their perspectives on the work of the respective organizations. The work programme of the mission and the main points of meetings held with the UNDP and UNFPA segments of the mission are attached to the present report as annex 3. Upon the conclusion of the mission, debriefing sessions were held with representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico to discuss the main findings of the mission, key aspects which are outlined below.

5. The visit provided an opportunity to observe first-hand the role of UNDP and the UNFPA in achieving the national strategy for growth and the Millennium Development Goals, as well as observe how they operate in a middle-income country that will soon "graduate" to net contributor country (NCC) status for UNDP. The Executive Board would like to thank the staff of UNDP and UNFPA for organizing a thoroughly educational and enjoyable field visit to Mexico.

II. Overview of cooperation with Mexico

6. Based on the main indicators of human development, Mexico is firmly established as a middle-income country. Mexico ranks 53rd on the 2006 human development index, is a large country with a per capita GDP of $9,803 and is likely to attain most of the MDGs at an early stage. Those main indicators, however, mask high levels of inequality and a high percentage of people living below the national poverty line (47% in 2005) and in extreme poverty (18.2% in 2005). These realities, together with the federal system of Mexico, present significant challenges for the work of the UNDP and the UNFPA. With 31 states plus the federal district of Mexico and a population of 105 million, the geographic size and diversity of the country pose a great challenge in terms of the provision and coverage of basic social

[1] A list of the members of the mission is attached as annex 1.

services. Mexico has substantial institutional, policy and human resource capacity; however, UNDP and UNFPA play a vital role in poverty eradication and bridging the gaps in access to services.

7. Collaboration between Mexico and UNDP dates from 1966. Twenty-one agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system are represented in Mexico. The principal points of focus of the UNCT are the cross-cutting themes related to the strengthening of democratic governance and the fight against poverty and inequality.

8. UNFPA has provided support to Mexico since 1972, collaborating closely with the Government through the National Population Council and the Health Ministry in support of the national population policy. The 2002-2007 programme of UNFPA is focused in the areas of population and development and sexual and reproductive health, with activities at the federal level and in eight of the poorest states, selected on the basis of their lack of progress on key development indicators, combined with favourable institutional and political environments.

III. Value added by the cooperation between UNDP/UNFPA and Mexico

9. UNDP and UNFPA have established strong, mutually beneficial relationships with the government of Mexico at both federal and state levels. UNDP and UNFPA have had lasting and mutually beneficial relationships with various civil society organizations that benefit from UNDP and UNFPA technical expertise, knowledge sharing and branding.

10. The overwhelming consensus of Mexican official institutions, the civil society and the private sector was their emphasis on the value of the relationship with the United Nations system, particularly UNDP and UNFPA. The value resides primarily in the moral authority, integrity and added value that the United Nations brings to the society as an influential and disinterested actor. Much interest was demonstrated in a continued close relationship with UNDP and UNFPA and their continued presence in Mexico. There appears to be significant demand for the services of the two organizations.

11. Mexico has made laudable strides in the economic, social and political arena, but that progress is somewhat tenuous, and is marked by significant disparities and inequalities along gender, geographical and other dimensions. UNDP and UNFPA are strategically placed to add significant value to efforts to achieve sustainable economic, social and political progress. On the surface, areas that appear to present good opportunities for continued meaningful involvement by UNDP include: strengthening the competitiveness of small and medium sized economic enterprises; electoral support; and democracy building. The experience of the UNDP and UNFPA in Mexico raises many questions with respect to the nature of United Nations involvement in middle-income countries. The many positive aspects of the experience noted by the mission suggest that Mexico might provide a useful paradigm of such collaboration.

12. The UNFPA model of bringing together relevant partners to tackle population challenges within a common framework, with a small infusion of resources, results in effective development results. UNFPA has been successful in focusing on areas of

high poverty and slow progress on key indicators, noting particularly the outreach to indigenous populations that make up only 10 per cent of the population but represent the highest level of poverty.

13. With the support of UNFPA, Mexico has been able to reduce the level of maternal mortality. For example, in partnership with the State Population Council in San Lois Potosí, UNFPA financial and technical contributions to maternal health programmes among indigenous people that link traditional healers and midwives with the formal medical system were found to reduce maternal mortality in the municipality of Acquismon from one of the highest rates in the country to zero in the past two years. That experience could be further promoted in other states.

14. The Government of Mexico, at both the federal and state levels (in nine states), has benefited from the lower negotiated prices of reproductive health commodities and has saved 75 per cent through UNFPA procurement. This is positive given the relatively high rate of teenage pregnancies (20 per cent) and the high portion (70 per cent) of women using contraceptives, many with unmet needs, particularly in rural areas, and for indigenous women.

15. UNFPA support has resulted in important research and institutional efforts to address the impact of migration. Although the Government has undertaken significant steps to confront the key economic and social reasons pushing people to leave the country, challenges still remain, particularly in the area of creating opportunities for youth and women migrants.

16. Inequalities between men and women persist in Mexico, despite progress in the last twenty years in the creation of institutional mechanisms and the enactment of laws to protect and promote women's rights. High rates of family violence (1 in 3 women), low participation of women in decision-making and lower than average literacy rates continue to handicap women's equality and social and economic development. The Executive Board did not find evidence of strong UN collaboration or effective UNFPA activity in promotion of gender equality. We anticipate this will be strengthened under the new country programme.

IV. The "graduation" question

17. The UNCT has given much consideration to maintaining the sustainability of efforts after Mexico achieves full NCC status on 31 December 2007 and UNDP "graduates" from its country programme. In that regard, the first harmonized country programme for Mexico, 2008-2012, under discussion with the Mexican authorities, takes account of this development and articulates strategies for greater coherence and joint programming in a qualitatively enhanced relationship with the Government of Mexico. There is a great challenge to ensure that all United Nations organizations can meet the demands of operating in the new context. The situation in Mexico, with middle-income status but the need for a very substantial United Nations programme, invites further consideration of the basis of "graduation", and additional innovative measures to support countries in the transitional phase.

V. Coordination and coherence

18. Mexico is now the 10th-largest contributor to the regular United Nations budget. At the end of 2007, Mexico will graduate to full NCC status within the UNDP. Its first harmonized programme cycle will guide the work of the entire UNCT work during 2008-2012. The UNCT has developed a broad range of national, state and municipal partnerships, including in civil society, academia, the private sector and the media that provide some 'space' and assistance in the implementation of its programmes.

19. The UNDAF for Mexico takes account of many of the significant aspects of the relationship and provides a good basis for future collaboration in Mexico. The process of dialogue on the UNDAF is continuing in Mexico. Another aspect relates to the personal qualities required of representatives to ensure a beneficial relationship. UNDP and UNFPA have the lead role in the implementation of the UNDAF.

VI. Recommendations

20. Further to the above observations and its own deliberations, the mission wishes to:

(a) *commend* the country team of the UNDP and the UNFPA on its work in implementing programmes for the benefit of the people of Mexico and especially in attaining and maintaining a status of moral authority as a reliable actor;

(b) *recognize* and encourage efforts to make UNDP and UNFPA financially self sustaining;

(c) *request* the Executive Board to give further consideration to the nature of the engagement of UNDP in Mexico under the criteria of 'graduation'. On the whole, UNDP and UNFPA appear to be perceived as valuable development partners who, in the future, will be expected to display great agility in responding to the varied needs of the country at different stages of growth and to build synergies, especially when operating in the context of the graduation of Mexico to full NCC status after 31 December 2007;

(d) *pursue* the optimization of the capacity of UNDP and UNFPA in Mexico;

(e) *commend* the significant advances in improving the operational efficiency and effectiveness of the UNCT;

(f) *recommend* a continuation of the UNFPA programme in Mexico, with increased focus on providing technical expertise to the Government, fostering political dialogue, and increasing activity in the poorest parts of the country to reduce the high levels of poverty;

(g) *strengthen* national capacity for reproductive health commodity security;

(h) *increase* the focus on the issue of adolescents, particularly given the high rate of teenage pregnancies (nearly 20 per cent). The recent decision by the government of Mexico City to legalize abortion has reinforced, for the government, the need to provide contraception and education, an area where UNFPA can play a key role;

(i) *ensure* UNDP, UNFPA and UNIFEM collaboration in the promotion of gender equality and the advancement of women, which are currently not sufficiently covered by the UNCT;

(j) *recommend* that UNDP, UNFPA and sister organizations work more collaboratively, particularly on issues of gender equality and youth;

(k) *provide* the first opportunity for joint approaches in the new UNDAF;

(l) *replicate* the knowledge and the lessons learned in Mexico in the developing countries. The potential impact of Mexico in South-South cooperation is great, and the role of the country support team in Mexico City in exploiting this should be enhanced;

(m) *recommend*, for the organization of future Executive Board field visits, not to divide the Board members into two groups (UNDP and UNFPA) for the mission, and to ensure there is sufficient time to jointly debrief with the UNCT and the Executive Board.

VII. Conclusion

21. Mexico provides a compelling insight into the value, challenges and potential of the UNDP and UNFPA work at the country level. The mission takes this opportunity to extend its gratitude to the Executive Board, the UNCT, the facilitators and the Government of Mexico for their excellent cooperation and for the arrangements made for the visit.

22. The Executive Board is invited to consider and approve the present report of the UNDP/UNFPA field visit.

Annex 1. List of participants in the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board field visit to Mexico (April/May 2007)

Regional group/Country	Name and title	Representing
Western Europe and other States		
Canada	Ms. Milica Nauman Senior Programme Officer Canadian International Development Agency	UNFPA
Finland	Ms. Tarja Fernandez Counsellor Permanent Mission	UNDP
African States		
Algeria	Mr. Nor-Eddine Benfreha Counsellor Permanent Mission	UNDP
Uganda	Mr. Benedict Lukwiya Minister Counsellor Permanent Mission	UNFPA
Asian and Pacific States		
Kazakhstan	Ms. Zhanar Kulzhanova Second Secretary Permanent Mission	UNFPA
China	Mr. Yao Wenlong Minister Counsellor Permanent Mission	UNDP
Latin American and the Caribbean States		
Ecuador	Mr. Gustavo Endara Second Secretary Permanent Mission	UNFPA
Guyana	Mr. Troy Torrington Second Secretary Permanent Mission	UNDP
Eastern European States		
Belarus	Mr. Uladzimir A. Gerus Counsellor Permanent Mission	UNDP
Russian Federation	Mr. Grigory V. Ustinov First Secretary Permanent Mission	UNFPA

The group was accompanied by Mr. Carlos G. Ruiz Massieu, Second Secretary, Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations; Mr. Kwabena Osei-Danquah, UNFPA Chief, Executive Board and External Relations Branch; and Ms. Elizabeth Scott Andrews, UNDP Senior Editor, Executive Board secretariat.

Annex 2. Meetings held and main points of meetings

Date	Meeting	Venue
Sunday, 29 April	**UNDP and UNFPA** Briefing on the agenda, security and logistical issues	UNFPA/UNDP premises
Monday, 30 April	**UNDP and UNFPA** Meeting with UNDP staff Meeting with UNFPA staff Meeting with CST Meeting with the United Nations country team	Prebisch Meeting Room United Nations premises
	UNFPA Field visit to the UNFPA cooperation programme in San Luis Potosí State, particularly in the Huasteca, one of the indigenous regions of the country. The main local counterpart is the State Population Council (COESPO).	San Luis Potosí
	UNDP Meeting with National Commission on the Development of Indigenous People	Mexico City
Tuesday, 1 May	**UNFPA** Meetings with community leaders, traditional physicians and midwives, school teachers and young students from Tenek and Nahuatl ethnic groups focused on development of projects related to reproductive health and sexual education supported by UNFPA. Presentation of the 'strengthening of the sexual education' model	Pequetzen Hotel
	Visit to Xilitla falls and Edward James Castle	Xilitla
	UNDP Field visit to several UNDP-supported land conservation, soil restoration and reforestation projects that sustain indigenous livelihoods in the Sierra Gorda region of Queretaro State. Meetings with the Director, Martha Isabel Ruiz Corzo, and the staff of the project, and with inhabitants of the protected "biosphere" area.	Sierra Gorda, Queretaro State

Wednesday, 2 May	**UNFPA**	
	Meeting with the San Luis Potosi Governor Marcelo de los Santos Fraga about the UNFPA cooperation programme in the State and its future perspectives.	Government premises
	Meeting with Ing. Jorge Lozano Armengo, Mayor of San Luis Potosi	
	Meeting with the State Population Council (COESPO) Presentation of results and perspective of UNFPA Cooperation Programme in the State (2002-2007).	Salon Virreynal, Westin Hotel
	Presentation by Dr. Pedro I. Martínez de Korres, State Delegate of INAPAM. Population Aging, on "General Reference of Law Initiative and Social Impact in S.L.P"	
	UNDP	
	Visits to small- and medium-sized enterprises belonging to the CEDIGRAF Business Development Centre, supported by the UNDP cooperation programme Desarrollo de Proveedores/Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Gráficas.	Guadalajara City, Jalisco State
	Visit to Value Chains, Hersheys Group.	
	Working luncheon meeting with the project team and private sector counterparts	
	Project presentation by Javier Rojo, Project Coordinator	
	Visits to MORFOTEC Enterprise, a medium-size enterprises belonging to CEDIGRAF	
	Visits to small size enterprises Grocery Store	
Thursday, 3 May	**UNFPA**	
	Breakfast meeting with Representatives from nine Civil Society organizations (SOMEDE, MEXFAM, DEMYSEX, CCD, IPAS, CORA, AMES, CIMAC, CSMR)	Mexico City
	Meeting with UNFPA Youth Advisory Panel	UNFPA office
	Working lunch with Dr. Mauricio Hernandez, Vice Minister of Prevention and Promotion of Health, and Dr. Patricia Uribe, Director of National Center for Gender Equity and Reproductive Health of Ministry of Health, on the main UNFPA cooperation areas with the health sector: universal access to SRH, contraceptives procurement and logistics and HIV/AIDS.	Ministry of Health, Mexico City

	UNDP Working breakfast meeting with senior officials of electoral institutions Mgda, María del Carmen Alanis (TEPJF), Mtro Patricio Ballados (TEPJF), Consejera Alejandra Latapi (IFE), Dr. Hector Díaz Santana (FEPADE). Meeting with Ilda Salazar and Verónica Vázquez of Red de Género y Medio Ambiente, and Balbina Hernández, Director of Equito and Gender, SEMARNAT. Working luncheon meeting with members of National Democratic Dialogue (civil society)	Hotel Camino Real, Mexico City INMUJERES / FEVIM, Mexico City Los Almendros restaurant, Mexico City
Friday, 4 May	**UNFPA** Visit to MEXFAM reproductive health clinic Meeting with the Vice Minister of Population, Migration and Religious Matters, Mr. Florencio Salazar: Presentation of the National Population Policy Priorities 2007-2012 **UNDP** Meeting with UNIFEM staff followed by debriefing with UNDP staff, conclusions of participants in field visit. **UNDP and UNFPA** Working luncheon meeting with Dr. Miguel Székely, Under-Secretary of Education Meeting with Mr. Felix Velez Under-Secretary of Planning and Evaluation from the Ministry of Social Affairs, SEDESOL Debriefing with UNFPA and UNDP representatives Meeting with officers from Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Mexico City Government premises Prebisch Meeting Room, United Nations premises, Mexico City El Cardenal restaurant, Mexico City SEDESOL, Mexico City United Nations premises, Mexico City Ministry of Foreign Affairs Mexico City